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ABSTRACT

This guidebook was developed by a team of elementary and secondary school English teachers to help teachers of all subjects with the difficult tasks of evaluating students' expository writing and stimulating student growth in the art and craft of writing. The twelve parts of the guidebook deal with the following topics: guidelines for giving a writing assignment in subject area classes, criteria for good writing, evaluation as a step in the writing process, relative emphasis, analytical and holistic scoring, the advantages and disadvantages of analytical and holistic scoring, adapting holistic scoring to the classroom, holistic scoring as a pre-revision step, using correction symbols, and making comments to students about their writing. The final section offers examples of how teachers have applied ideas and techniques described in this booklet. (RL)

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MEASURE FOR MEASURE

A Guidebook for Evaluating

Students' Expository Writing

This guide was funded in part by the Massachusetts Department of Education; its content, however, is not necessarily official policy of the Department.

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A Guidebook for Evaluating Students' Expository Writing

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Pittsfield, Massachusetts *1980*

MEASURE FOR MEASURE:

EVALUATING STUDENTS' EXPOSITORY WRITING

"Hasn't anybody taught these kids anything about writing?" The cry is often echoed by any teacher faced with the challenge of evaluating a written assignment - whether it be a research report for social studies, a lab report for science, an essay for English, or a subjective test answer for any subject.

Evaluating students' writing *is* a challenge, for the evaluator is placed in the role of a judge who must examine the case at hand through knowledge, wisdom, and at least a measure of empathy before pronouncing a verdict. That verdict, if unfavorable to the defendant, should not be punitive, but instructional. Its purpose must be to help the student develop skills in the craft of writing, which includes the skills of observing, selecting, organizing, and expressing facts, ideas, and feelings in clear, comprehensible language.

Because there are not fixed standards by which students' expository writing can be graded, evaluation of compositions is a highly subjective process. This guide has, therefore, been developed by a team of teachers of English in elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Berkshire County. Our intent is to help teachers of all subjects in the difficult task of evaluating students' expository writing in a manner that may lead students to grow in the art and craft of writing .

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING A WRITING ASSIGNMENT IN SUBJECT-AREA CLASSES

The results of a particular writing assignment often correlate with the kind of pre-writing experiences and the post-writing expectations in which the assignment has been embedded. Problems in writing may frequently be traced to students' uncertainty about the assignment and its purpose, their inadequate knowledge about the subject, their lack of motivation, or their suspicion that no one will really be interested in what they have written. Since the development of writing skills is reinforced through writing activities throughout the schools' curricula, the following guidelines are offered for giving an assignment in expository writing in any subject.

1. *Regard writing as a process which requires*
   a. *finding information on the subject;*
   b. *focusing on a specific topic;*
   c. *selecting details pertinent to the topic;*
   d. *organizing information into some logical pattern;*
   e. *manipulating sentence structure;*
   f. *employing conventions such as spelling, punctuation, usage.*
2. *Prepare students adequately for the writing assignment by*
   a. *providing enough information or sources of information;*
   b. *anticipating problems students may encounter in the process described above;*
   c. *demonstrating some ways these problems may be solved;*
   d. *providing clear and complete directions;*
   e. *expecting students to revise, proofread, and rewrite their papers, and to turn in a finished final copy.*
3. *Evaluate students' papers,*
   a. *commending successes;*
   b. *explaining how to correct weakness or solve problems.*

N.B.: See "Commenting to Students Students about Their Writing" and "Adapting Holistic Scoring to the Classroom".

4. *Make appropriate use of the finished papers by*
   a. *duplicating particularly effective papers (or parts thereof) for reading by the class;*
   b. *having some papers read aloud;*
   c. *displaying some papers on a bulletin board;*
   d. *publishing papers in a class journal, booklet, or textbook or handbook; or*
   e. *using some selections as materials for further class study on the subject.*

Composition is a complex process. Though using these guidelines may seem to impose further work upon the instructor and require some additional time, the investment of instruction and time could return substantial profit in students' development of writing skills and mastery of subject matter.

CRITERIA FOR GOOD WRITING

Before scoring students' written composition, the teacher should have in mind some specific criteria by which to evaluate the writing. This set of criteria is offered as a GUIDE for teachers of ALL DISCIPLINES to use when they evaluate papers students have written in response to an assignment. These criteria should be

- modified according to learning levels,
- developed to increasing degrees of sophistication as students master writing skills,
- considered during the reading and evaluating of students' writing.

While all these criteria are standards for good writing, each area should be evaluated in accordance with the objectives of the assignment; that is, for one assignment content may outweigh diction, whereas for another assignment more emphasis may be placed on diction and order. In neither assignment would the other areas be ignored.

CONTENT

Does the paper focus on a specific subject?
Does the writer demonstrate knowledge of the subject?
Is the purpose of the paper made evident to the reader?
Are generalizations supported by specific details?
Are ideas original and clear
or
are borrowed ideas credited to their sources?

ORGANIZATION

Does the introduction prepare the reader for the content?
Is the organization easy to follow?
Is there a clear connection from one point to another?
Are all details related to the purpose of the paper?
Does the conclusion re-emphasize the purpose or summarize the content?

DICTION

Are words used accurately?
Where appropriate, do words appeal to the reader's senses?
Is the language appropriate to the purpose of the paper and to the intended reader?

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Are sentences complete?
Are sentences separated by end-punctuation, rather than run-together?
Are sentences free of choppy, unnecessarily repetitive constructions?
Is sentence structure varied?

FORM

Is penmanship legible?
Is the writing free from errors in word-usage?
Are words spelled correctly?
Are punctuation marks and capital letters correctly used?

EVALUATION: A STEP IN THE WRITING PROCESS

No matter how stimulating and creative the writing assignment may be, no matter how much pre-writing activity may be involved, the evaluation of students' writing remains a vital step in teaching students how to articulate their observations, feelings, knowledge, and reasoning. Before taking on the responsibility of evaluating compositions – whether they be essays or reports, process papers or test answers – we should make certain assumptions.

1/ If we have given a writing assignment, we *do have* a *responsibility* to evaluate the writing.
2/ Evaluation of writing *is a possible* task.
3/ Evaluation involves both subjective and objective aspects.
4/ Evaluation should get to the *heart* of the writing – content and expression, not merely to the conventions – punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
5/ Evaluation should lead to *action* – to revision, reteaching, or reinforcement of successes, and certainly to future improvement.
6/ Thoughtful evaluation of students' writing is evidence of concern for students.

If evaluation is to be honest, realistic, and constructive, perhaps a first step we should occasionallly take is to perform the writing assignment we set for the students. It is one thing to talk about writing, quite another to understand the work and frustration that underlie the act of writing. The writing experience can help us to evaluate students' writing not only as teachers but also as writers. As we evaluate, we should keep the following guidelines in mind.

1/ Be aware of the tone of our comments. Writers are defensive about their writing. (See COMMENTING TO STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WRITING.)
2/ Give a reason for suggesting stylistic changes. It is more constructive to say, "Reverse the order of details (or of this sentence) for better emphasis." than to write, "Weak order." or "Vary sentences." or "Better to say . . ."
3/ In the terminal notes, make specific commendations first. Students learn from their successes as well as from their mistakes. Instead of writing, "Good Paragraph." write, "You develop the idea with three strong examples."
4/ Use a standard set of symbols to indicate mechanical and technical errors. Allow class time to check the item in a handbook and to correct the error on the paper. (see USING CORRECTION SYMBOLS.)
5/ If a paper is poorly organized, consider making or starting an outline for the student, or asking the student to try outlining the paper as it is written.
6/ Follow up your evaluation. Check to see that the student makes use of your corrections and comments, either by revising the work or by applying the corrections and comments to a subsequent assignment.

RELATIVE EMPHASIS: Evaluating Content (What Is Said) Form (How It Is Said), and Mechanics (Punctuation, Spelling and Other Conventions).

The papers have been collected, and they are yours to evaluate. What does a teacher need to know, to weigh, to do? It is at this point that all teachers who assign writing must shine, for what is written on a student's paper must be carefully considered. Will the comments urge the student to write in the future? Will they evoke a desire to write better? Will the lines of communication be open between teacher and student, or will teacher purpose the student understanding grow apart? What do teachers do with the writing that says nothing in a technically correct manner, or with the paper that is solid in content but weak in conventions?

The five sections of the list of criteria (p.3) may suggest a hierarchy of importance – from content to form. Another view is that one section could be emphasized for one assignment, and different sections for other assignments. It is possible that problems in clarity or unity need so much attention that correction of errors in punctuation may be postponed until the more serious problems are solved. If there is one commonality that all teachers should maintain – regardless of how the entire list, its separate sections, or its details are used – it is that evaluation must be based on some criteria and must be designed to help students to write well.

Before the application of the criteria, the teacher must be clear on the nature of the assignment, pre-writing steps, the instructional objectives, and the ability of each student. (See Guidelines for Giving a Writing Assignment.) It is particularly important to keep in mind that any comments, suggestions, directions, or grades be given in proportion to the ability of the student to use them to improve writing competency.

It is probable that most papers, after having been evaluated, can be improved by some degree of rewriting. If an entire paper seems to require more effort than a student can probably give, a paragraph, a specific weakness, a page may be selected to be revised. Spelling can be corrected without rewriting an entire paper. Indeed, if errors are indicated in pencil, it is possible for the students to make corrections prior to submitting the paper for final evaluation. On the other hand, if a paper is incoherent but contains the seed of an idea, it is a waste of time to correct errors; the effort should be placed on helping the student to cultivate the seed.

The teacher's creativity and concern should guide the use of the CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING STUDENTS' WRITING.

What is the difference between analytical and holistic scoring?

ANALYTICAL SCORING: AN OVERVIEW

Analytical scoring of students' papers involves the close reading and examination of the many components of each paper: the content, organization, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, etc. We score analytically when we mark spelling errors, insert punctuation marks, call attention to need for transitional phrases, correct an error in agreement, or point out that an idea is too vague, an expression trite, or a paragraph disorganized.

Before scoring papers analytically, the evaluator establishes specific criteria by which papers will be judged:

Does this paper contain certain points of information?

Is it organized according to a certain pattern?

Is it free from errors in x, y, and z?

Does it fulfill the purpose (to ————)?

Criteria for evaluating a set of papers analytically may be selected from those listed in this booklet under CRITERIA FOR GOOD WRITING.

Analytical scoring provides opportunities for teachers to help students develop the craft of writing. It allows the evaluator to describe a paper's strengths and weaknesses to the writer, point out errors or make corrections, comment on the quality of a paper or make suggestions for improving it. It also offers opportunities for the teacher and the student to focus on specific problems in writing that need attention, for by analyzing the paper, the teacher can prescribe a remedy for a certain ailment.

Analytical scoring has some disadvantages. It is time-consuming because it calls for careful examination of a paper. Sometimes this careful examination focuses the reader's attention of flaws, so that the paper's total effect may be subordinated to consideration of its parts. Unless the evaluator's comments are constructive, analytical scoring can have the negative effects of stressing only the flaws and convincing students that writing is a punitive activity leading to failure. (For suggestions on how to make analytical scoring a constructive, productive effort, see EVALUATION: A STEP IN THE WRITING PROCESS and COMMENTING TO STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WRITING.)

Considered and treated as a step in teaching the writing process, analytical scoring of students' writing is an important contribution to developing the craft of writing. It can be worth the work.

HOLISTIC SCORING: AN OVERVIEW

Holistic scoring is based on the idea that the whole composition is greater than its components, that no component may be judged apart from the whole, and that all components should be judged simultaneously. The term 'holistic' derives from 'whole'. Holistic scoring, therefore, involves reading and scoring a paper on the total effect of the first impression. In one case, clairty, forcefulness of expression, and originality may outweigh errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar, to create a positive impression. In another case errors in syntax or mechanics may not be outweighed by the content and expression of the paper.

Holistic scoring involves a team approach. Scorers first read and analyze the topic on which a set of papers has been written. They then read and discuss a sample range of those papers and establish some standards by which the particular set of compositions may be scored superior, good, fair, or poor. Next, they proceed with the scoring process.

Each paper is read by two or three evaluators, who, independent of one-another, score the paper on a four-point scale ranging from superior (4) to poor (1). (So that one reader does not know how another reader has scored a paper, each reader may be assigned a code to stand for 4, 3, 2, 1, or they may mark their scores on separate lists of a class set.) If the scores on a paper are *adjacent (e.g.:* 1/2, 2/3, 3/4) or *identical,* they are added to give a total. If they are *discrepant (e.g.:* 1/3, 2/4, 1/4) another reader – usually a person who has been appointed chief reader – decides how the paper shoud be scored.

Advantages of holistic scoring are numerous. The process is efficient, for it requires that less time be spent on each paper. It requires consensus among the scorers; indeed, when scores are discrepant, there usually ensues worthwhile discussion about the merits of the paper and about what constitutes good writing. It usually stresses positive aspects of students' writing. It involves scorers (teachers of writing) in articulating a set of standards to guide their determination of a paper's scores.

Holistic scoring, unlike analytical scoring, does not provide for the correction of errors and the writing of comments to individuals about their compositions. It is, however, a valid alternative way to score large sets of compositions.

ANALYTICAL AND HOLISTIC SCORING OF WRITING: ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES OF EACH

Analytical Scoring

Precise criteria make deciding correctness realtively easy.

Identification of particular components (or skills) which an individual student needs to work on is facilitated.

The scorer may address specific comments about a particular composition to the writer of that paper.

Analysis of components of a composition is time-consuming.

Using a standard set of criteria for evaluating all papers may be over-restrictive.

Scoring is done by one evaluator, so no opportunity is offered to scorers to gain new insights through prescoring sessions.

Emphasis is often placed on flaws rather than strengths of a paper.

Holistic Scoring

Criteria treat writing as a whole product, rather than as a set of separate components. The components are therefore considered simultaneously.

Having more than one evaluator score each paper leads to a fairly accurate assessment of a student's overall writing ability.

During the pre-scoring sessions evaluators have opportunities to gain new insights into writing through discussion of strengths and weaknesses of sample papers, and through sharing of ideas about writing. These insights are often carried over into classroom teaching practices.

Emphasis is usually placed on strengths of a paper.

Many papers may be read and scored in relatively short time.

There is no opportunity for an evaluator to address specific comments about a particular composition to the writer.

Adapted from *Basic Skills Assessment: Manual for Scoring the Writing Sample*, published by Educational Testing Service

ADAPTING HOLISTIC SCORING TO THE CLASSROOM

Engaging students in holistic scoring of papers written by students on a given topic can be dually beneficial. The students become increasingly aware of what makes a good expository paragraph – the kind they will need to write when they answer subjective test questions. They closely examine the subject matter and so reinforce what they know or learn something that they do not know.

The process is not difficult. On one day give students a specific topic on which they should write no more than one page – or as little as one paragraph. The topic should be drawn from recent or current class study and should be limited enough to allow students to address the topic within fifteen or twenty minutes.

Examples:

1. *Explain what a food chain is. Give a specific example that illustrates your explanation.*
2. *An ideal of youth in Ancient Greece was to be physically strong and mentally alert. Show how one of the heroes we have studied exemplifies this ideal.*
3. *Describe how one of the cultural groups we have studied has adapted to the climate in which it lives. Be sure to identify the group and the type of climate.*
4. *In the play, Julius Caesar, a soldier thinks of Caesar as an eagle, Cassius considers him a wolf, and Brutus suggests that he's a snake in its shell. Explain what each person means by the metaphor he uses.*

The teacher should also write a response to the item in order to know more precisely what a response should include and to discover any problems that the item may cause.

After allowing about fifteen to twenty minutes for the writing of the papers, collect them. Score them holistically, using a 1 (poor) – 2 (fair) – 3 (good) – 4 (excellent) scale. Place the number on the back of the student's paper. From the 2 – 3 – 4 papers choose three or four, taking at least one from each score. (There is little value in having the class examine a paper scored 1.) Blank out the students' names and duplicate those papers, making a copy for each student in the class.

At the next class meeting distribute the duplicated papers. Ask students to read and score each paper on the 1-2-3-4 scale. Allow no more than ten minutes for students to score the papers. Then hold a discussion about the papers – their accuracy, clarity, organization, relevance to the topic, etc. Survey the degree of consensus of scores assigned by the students to each paper. Reexamine any paper on which there seems to be wide discrepancy of scores.

It is this discussion that leads to greater understanding of what good expository writing is and to increased knowledge of the subject matter being taught. The entire activity, including the writing, holistic scoring by students, and the discussion, takes about one-half of each of two class periods.

HOLISTIC SCORING AS A PRE-REVISION STEP

Holistic scoring by students is a valuable way to teach revision of composition. After students have written a readable draft of a composition, ask them to use their telephone numbers (or some other code) in place of their names and collect their papers. Then divide the class into groups of three or four. Next, give each group a number of compositions equal to the number of students in the group. Be sure that no group receives papers written by any one in that group. Give each student a strip of paper on which to record the code number of all three or four papers given that group. Each student in the group should read each paper, evaluate it on a 4-3-2-1 scale (using criteria established during pre-writing activities), and place the score for each paper opposite the code listed on the strip of paper. Then each student passes the paper to the next person in the group, until all members of the group have read and scored the three or four papers given to them. Finally, the students compare the scores they have assigned to each paper and discuss reasons for the scores.

Two options may follow this activity. One is that the teacher may place a five-column chart on the board, the first labeled Paper No. —, and the rest labeled 4-3-2-1. The scores are then recorded on the chart, to show the degree of agreement or discrepancy of judgment among the readers. Another option is that each group may write a short note of praise or constructive criticism to attach to each paper scored by that group.

Finally, papers are returned to their authors for revision. This holistic scoring prior to revision takes about a half hour or less, and pays to both the students and the teacher dividends that make the investment a very profitable one.

USING CORRECTION SYMBOLS: PREFACE

Grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling do not in themselves constitute the highest skills of the writing process; nevertheless, students do need to master the conventions because readers expect writers to use these conventions – and because these conventions do indeed contribute to effective written communications. When analytically evaluating students' papers, the teacher needs to address problems in mechanics of the writing.

The use of a standard set of correction symbols is not meant to focus on the conventions of writing more than on the content, language, and organization. It is meant instead to prevent confusion about what the symbols mean. The use of a standard set of correction symbols from grade to grade and across all subject disciplines in which the students write should help students develop an understanding of what the symbols mean.

When using these symbols, a teacher must consider the current needs of the student. The choice of corrections the teacher makes should depend on the student's grade level, ability, and knowledge. For example, to use a symbol signifying lack of parallelism on a paper written by a student who does not understand the principle of parallel structure is not only a futile gesture by the teacher but very likely a meaningless note for the student. If a student is not capable of finding the correct spelling of *pneumatic* or *gnu*, it may be more productive to spell the word correctly for the student than to use a symbol.

The most effective way for a teacher to use these symbols is to select those most relevant to the class. Then, in the beginning of the year, the teacher should explain the symbols, give examples of the error each symbol signifies, and demonstrate ways to avoid or correct those errors. Ideally, the teacher will reinforce recognition and correction of the errors by having students edit their papers and present corrected copies.

The symbols included herein do not represent every kind of error in grammar, usage, spelling, or punctuation. The set of symbols is deliberately limited. While teachers of rhetoric or advanced composition may wish to add symbols, this set is designed to address common errors and to be manageable for students to deal with.

The explanation of symbols included in this guidebook may be duplicated and distributed to students. When they receive a corrected paper, they may be allowed time to examine the explanation of symbols and to make the corrections.

CORRECTION SYMBOLS: EXPLANATION

TO THE STUDENT: You've been handed back your composition. The thought and energy and hard work that you've put into it are paid off with scrawls and squiggles that indicate you've done something wrong – but you're not quite sure what you've done wrong, or how to do it right. Here is a list of some commonly used symbols, the kind of error that each symbol stands for, and some suggested ways to correct the error. As you work on solving each problem, you may find fewer symbols per page on each succeeding composition you write.

PROBLEMS WITH WORDS

Sp SPELLING – *A word is spelled wrong. Consult a dictionary or a spelling book, or see if your teacher has given you the correct spelling.*

T TENSE – *The tense of the verb is incorrect. Perhaps you started to use the past tense and then, for no reason, shifted to the present.*

Example: I was minding my own business. A cold hand grasps my wrist.

Solution: I was minding my own business. A cold hand grasped my wrist.

Consult an English text. Look up Verbs–tense (*or* consistency of tense).

D DICTION – *You may have used a vague word (like* said *or* house) *where a more specific word (like* shouted *or* hovel) *would be more effective.*

WW WRONG WORD – *You have used a word incorrectly.*

Examples: They were *overtaken* by smoke. / The students studied very hard for *there* test. / After sending them out of the room, the teacher *revoked* them.

Look the word up in a dictionary, consult the homonym *section of an English book, or check the 'confused words' section of a vocabulary book. If these don't help, ask your teacher.*

∧ OMISSION – *A word or phrase is needed to make the sentence clear.*

U USAGE – *The wrong form of a word is used, as in these sentences:*

Her and *me* were chosen. / I did *good* on the test. / They *snuk* up on us.

PROBLEMS WITH SENTENCES

RO *RUN-ON SENTENCE – Two sentences are punctuated as one. Read the sentences aloud. Place the appropriate end-punctuation (period, question mark, or exclamation mark) where it belongs or use connecting words.*

Example: It was the last day of school even the principal was happy.

Solution: It was the last day of school. Even the principal was happy.
It was the last day of school, and even the principal was happy.
Because it was the last day of school, even the principal was happy.

F *FRAGMENT – The group of words is not a sentence.*

Example: Because I wasn't sure of the answer.

Solution: I wasn't sure of the answer.
Because I wasn't sure of the answer, I left it blank.

dang *DANGLING PHRASE – A phrase does not modify the word it is meant to.*

Example: Turning the corner, the mountain came into view.

Solution: Turning the corner, we could see the mountain.
As we turned the corner, the mountain came into view.

Consult an English text. Look up Participial Phrases – dangling.

agr *AGREEMENT – A verb and its subject do not agree in number; either the verb is singular and the subject is plural or vice-versa.*

Example: Every person in the bleachers are waving a banner.

Solution: Every person in the bleachers is waving a banner.
All the people in the bleachers are waving banners.

This symbol may also mean that a pronoun does not agree in number with the noun it refers to; one is singular, the other is plural.

Example: No serf of feudal lords owned their own house.

Solution: No serf of feudal lords owned his or her own house.
No serfs of feudal lords owned their own houses.

Consult an English text. Look up Agreement.

P *PRONOUN REFERENCE – The noun that a pronoun refers to is not clear.*

Example: When the Spitfires met the Daredevils, they challenged them.

Solution: The Daredevils challenged the Spitfires when the two gangs met.

Example: Other gangs know that the Spitfires are fearless, and they respect it.

Solution: Other gangs respect the Spitfires' fearlessness.

Consult an English text. Look up Pronouns–reference (or antecedent).

? *UNCLEAR – The meaning of a sentence is not clear to a reader. Re-read the sentence. Then re-write it.*

PROBLEMS WITH PARAGRAPHS

¶ *START A NEW PARAGRAPH HERE – Because you have started a new topic, or a new unit of related details, you should start a new paragraph.*

No ¶ *DO NOT START A NEW PARAGRAPH – Since you are continuing with the same set of related details, there is no need to start a new paragraph.*

SS *SUBJECT SHIFT – You started writing in one person, then shifted to another. Stick to the same person.*

Example: One of my most satisfying activities is cross-country skiing. When you get into the snow-filled woods, your nerves relax and you find peace.

Solution: One of my most satisfying activities is cross-country skiing. When I get into the woods, my nerves relax, and I find peace.

Consult an English text. Look up Subject Shift.

Rep *REPETITIVE (or REDUNDANT) – Either the same information is unnecessarily repeated or a certain word or phrase is unnecessary because it means the same as another word or phrase in the passage.*

Example: In this modern society of today people seem to be rushing about quickly and aimlessly. Many don't know where they are going.

Solution: In this modern society many people seem to be rushing about aimlessly. These people need to pause and ask, "Where am I going?"

PROBLEMS WITH PUNCTUATION

O *PUNCTUATION MARK OMITTED – Some punctuation mark is needed here.*

Example: The childrens program begins at 2:30 p m

Solution: The children's program begins at 2:30 p.m.

⊘ *PUNCTUATION MARK IS EITHER INCORRECT OR UNNECESSARY – The punctuation mark should be either changed or removed.*

Example: The children's program begins at 2:30 p m

Solution: The children's program begins at 2:30 p.m.

COMMENTING TO STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WRITING

Teachers who assign written composition in any discipline should subscribe to a philosophy that evaluation of writing is an important step in helping students develop the craft of writing. This philosophy is evidenced in the manner in which we speak to students about their writing.

It is not enough simply to put a grade and some corrections on a student's piece of writing. More important than grades or corrections is what teachers say to students about their writing -- and how we say it. Our comments must be designed *to help students develop the craft of writing.* (See Guidelines for Giving Writing Assignments in Subject-Area Classes.) When writing comments to a student about a paper, we must be considerate of that student's strengths and weaknesses and then write comments that will reinforce those strengths and address those weaknesses.

Students respond more positively to constructive, personalized comments than they do to negative criticism. Terms such as *dull, trite, vague, irrelevant,* or *It's obvious that you scrawled this out at the last minute* often make students discouraged about their own ability to write, for comments like these - especially when tendered with no concrete suggestions - confirm students' convictions that writing is a punitive act.

From elementary grades on through high school and beyond many students need to be assured that writing is not a punitive act but a creative process, one which they are capable of performing. To establish and reinforce students' convictions that they can learn to write, wise teachers start with a positive point: *You really help me to see ... Your directions are easy to follow ... Your first argument is a strong one. Great phrase!* It is important to alert students to something they've done right, as well as to point out something they've done wrong. It is vital to explain how to remedy a problem, rather than simply to state that there is one.

Criticism is made constructive by suggesting ways to improve the paper. Constructive criticism narrows the critcism to a specific problem, helps the student to understand the problem, and suggests how the problem may be solved. Constructive comments can help students to develop positive attitudes toward writing, and assure students that they can write, that they can express what they know, what they think, what they need, or what they feel, in clear written composition. Commenting to students about their writing plays a vital role in this process. This section offers samples of constructive comments designed to fulfill this role effectively.

COMMENTING CONSTRUCTIVELY TO STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR WRITING

These are some suggested ways to comment to students about their writing so that we do not just alert students to a problem but so that we also help them to understand and solve that problem. While these suggested comments do not cover the range of possible problems we encounter as we evaluate students' writing, they do offer examples of appropriate tone and specificity which can characterize our notes to students about their compositions.

Comments numbered with Roman numerals are vague and not particularly helpful. Those preceded by Arabic numbers are constructive in tone and specificity.

I/ Irrelevant – This has nothing to do with your topic.

1/ This fact is true. You need to relate it to your topic by explaining how it affects (the food chain – Brutus's decision – the need for a new law).

2/ How is this detail (that polar bears are a main attraction at the zoo) related to your purpose (to show how an animal is adapted to its environment)?

3/ Your final paragraph starts a new topic. Revise it (to summarize the details in the body of your paper) (to emphasize that the evidence you have given supports your theory) (to underscore that each side's insistence that it is totally right may cause another war).

4/ This information can be the topic of another paper. Save it!

5a/ Since you are trying to describe the Valentine displays at the candy store, you should not discuss the effects of candy on teeth. Instead, try to show more of the colors, shapes, and smells of the displays.

5b/ Your mention of the effects of candy on the teeth can be made relevant by including the idea that in spite of these effects . . .

II/ Your details are so disorganized that they confuse the reader.

1/ List the steps for (changing spark plugs - playing backgammon - taking 35 mm slides - making candles) in order. Use terms like first, while, be sure to, next *and* after *to connect these steps. Then describe the process in order.*

2/ Pretend you are shooting a film of the scene. Decide where you would begin, in what direction you would move, what details you would focus on, and where you would end. Use that pattern to organize your descirption.

3/ Since this is your strongest argument, place it last. As the climax of your essay, it will make a stronger impression on readers.

4/ Details are specific and clear. They need to be organized so that a reader who does not know the topic can follow your comparison.

Try one of these patterns:

Introduction	*Introduction*	
Rock and Swing	*Rock*	*Swing*
Major Instruments	*Instruments*	*Instruments*
Most Common Rhythms	*Rhythms*	*Rhythms*
Themes of Lyrics	*Themes*	*Themes*
Moods Created	*Effects on*	*Effects on*
Conclusion	*Listeners*	*Listeners*
	Conclusion	

5/ To show your readers you've shifted to the past, use a phrase here like, ("The whistle reminded me of ..." – "Last month ..." - "It hasn't always been ...")

III/ Your subject is too broad for a paper of this length.

1/ You've chosen a current subject (New Sources of Energy). You need to narrow it to focus on one area; for example (Solar Energy: A Limitless Resources - Fuel from Corn for Our Cars - Electricity from the Tides).

2/ Make this the topic of your paper. Develop it with three specific examples. Save these ideas and use them as topics for two different short papers.

3/ Make a list of specific details that (support - prove - demonstrate) this statement. Then use this statement as a topic sentence and three or four of your details.

4/ Instead of trying to tell about (your whole camping trip - all your dog's habits – everything that happened last New Year's Day), try to show your readers (the trials and fun of putting up the tent in the wind – ways your dog acts like a human being – trying to stay up until midnight).

5/ Instead of trying to cover the subject (Pollution - Shakespeare - Africa), make a chart like the one below. Place the topic you have chosen in the top, large box. Then split it into two, placing each sub-topic in the lower box. Keep splitting each sub-topic until you arrive at one that you can treat thoroughly in this paper.

6/ Since (the Incas - the moon - spiders) can be the subject of a whole book, focus on one topic that you can treat in a paragraph; for example (sacrificial practices of the Incas – Does the moon cause madness? – How orb-weaving spiders catch their prey).

IV/ Your paper is full of vague, general statements which you do not support.

1/ Make a list of specific (examples - facts - incidents- word pictures) that (support - prove - demonstrate - illustrate) this statement. Then choose three or four of these to develop your paragraph.

2/ You say that chopping wood is hard work. Show *that it is by describing the weight of the axe, the vibration of the blows, the feelings in your arm and back.*

3/ To demonstrate how the Tories and the Whigs differed explain each group's position on some specific issues, like the Stamp Tax, British troops in Boston, and the Port of Boston Act.

4/ Your opening grabs attention. Carry the idea through by identifying and describing some life-forms that flourish under rocks, like centipedes, sow bugs, and worms.

5/ You need to prove that Godfrey is a hypocrite. Point out specific contradictions between what he pretends to be and what deeds he hides.

6/ Can you help us to see your dog?

7/ Try to show us you were afraid without using the words fear, afraid, scary, scared, *or* frightened. *Instead, describe what you saw, what you heard, what you did, and what happened to you.*

V/ Redundant. -- Repetitive. -- You keep saying the same thing over.

1/ Combine these sentences into one so that the underlined words do not need to be repeated.

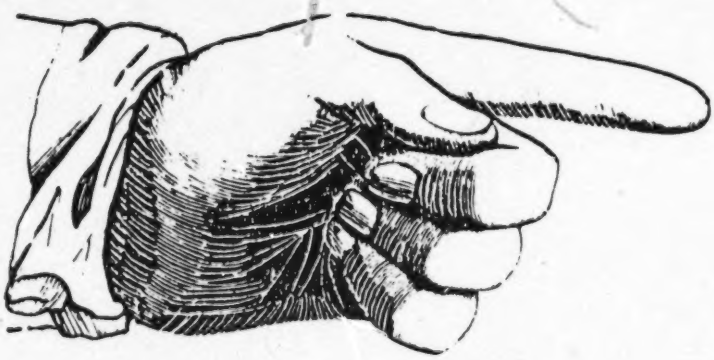
2/ Instead of repeating that (school is like a prison - a system of bicycle trails should be built - everything had changed in Tarrytown) explain what you mean. (What rules, physical features, and activities make school like a prison? - Show where the trails should be built, how they could be paid for, who would use them, and how the trails would help people. What specific changes did Rip observe when he returned to Tarrytown?)

3/ Reread this sentence aloud. What phrase can be cut?

4/ Four times you tell us that (the Berkshires is a great place to live - goldfish make fine pets - the United States was the aggressor in the Mexican-American War – radials are better than bias-ply tires). Make the statement just once. Then prove it with specific reasons. (Cite recreational opportunities or scenery or culture. Describe the calming effects of observing goldfish.– Explain the role of Manifest Destiny. Tell how long radials last or how much they improve gas mileage.)

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

This brief portfolio of papers offers some examples of how teachers have applied ideas and techniques described in this booklet. From the numerous examples submitted, the editor selected a sampling to represent many grades and a variety of topics.



SAMPLE COMMENTS TO STUDENTS AND THE TEACHER

PAPER 1 – TO THE STUDENT:

1. *As a noun, "want" means "lack of". In this case, use "desire that her country . . ."*

(2.) *Perhaps you mean, "I benefited from reading about Maia's love . . ."*

(3.) *Revise this sentence to tell how her love for her father affected you.*

(4.) *Your concluding sentence is clear and concise. Good!*

N _____.

In your opening you should identify the title and the author. Change verbs marked T to simple present, because the book is still in existence.

I like your arrangement of details in order of importance.

PAPER 1 – TO THE TEACHER:

Giving a topic is an effective way to limit the focus of a paper, but the word "benefit" in this assignment could be confusing. Perhaps a rephrasing of the topic sentence would help this student; e.g.: I learned a great deal from reading _____. Students should be asked to supply the title of the book and the name of the author.

ASSIGNMENT: Describe benefits of reading a biography which you chose.

Paper 1: Ther were many benefits in this biography. First, there was Maia's want for her country to win the war. She and her brother steal ammunition from the Germans to shoot them when they go on parade. The reader benefited from this by learning that even if a situation seemed desparate, one can still try to help. (2) Another benefit was Maia's ability to learn many languages without the benefit of school. This was good because it showed that if a person is determined enough, they can learn to do just about anything, even if it seems impossible. The most important benefit was Maia's love for her father. (3) Even though he neglected the family and tried to get away form them, especially when he was not allowed to fight, Maia forgave him and continued to love and admire him. Maia's devotion to her country, her ability to learn, and her love for her father were some of the reasons why this autobiography was a great book to the reader. (4)

PAPER 2 -- TO THE STUDENT:

N _____,

You clearly summarize some points in the story. You do not explain how reading the book benefited you.

Did you learn anything about relationships between people and pets?

Has the story changed any ideas you had about animals or attitudes toward them?

1. *Fine sentence! You've used mature words well and emphasized an unusual fact.*
2. *Good example.*

Check and correct errors in agreement of pronouns

PAPER 2 TO THE TEACHER:

This paper also suffers from weak direction, for the word "benefits" seems not to have been made clear. The student has made a good selection of points to be admired in the story, but has not used them to support the topic sentence. The details trail off without reaching any conclusion.

Paper 2: Many benefits cam from reading this book' First of all, Knight shows the great devotion on a dog to its master. Lassie traveled over four hundred miles just to meet Joe at the school gate. Although not all dogs travel this far, many embark on incredible journeys to be reunited with their masters. Knight also shows that no matter how tame one may think their dog may be, the dog still has natral instincts of their ancestors. Lassie always relied on humans for food, water, and shelter. But she had to hunt and find her own shelter during her journey relying on her instincts. Most important, though, is the courageous honesty displayed by Carracloughs. Although they had many chances to keep Lassie while she was rightfully the Duke's they did not, and were ready to return her after her four hundred mile journey home.

Fourth-grader S _____ had a story to tell. She wrote unhesitatingly. On the opposite page is part of the result. Discouraging? Yes. Hopeless? No! In that increasingly incoherent jumble, the teacher knew there was a message. Starting to correct the errors, the teacher soon realized that there would be nearly as many corrections as there are words.

The teacher asked S _____ to read her story, while the teacher observed the writing, and, on separate paper, took a few verbatim notes to record phrases that were not decipherable from the writing. Then the teacher copied S_____'s story, with words spelled correctly and with punctuation marks and capital letters in their places.

S _____ was given the story she wrote, copied as it should be. She was asked to recopy the model, so that it could be shared - in her handwriting - with other people. To help her with the recopying, she was given a 6" x 8" card to use as a marker and a dot was placed at the starting point of each line on the paper.

The story does not end there. Like her classmates, she designed her own book, recopied her story in her own illustrated format, and, before audiences of little children and of adults, read her story aloud. S_____, who rarely knew the joy of success, thoroughly enjoyed the audiences' attention and applause.

This success helped S _____ to dispel the notion that she'll never learn how to write, and gave her teachers a starting point from which to teach her.

Bluebird

All about the Bonnie's

One day Tom Tom cried, "Help me, help me!" said the cave owl. The "Cave" gone to eat one he said to the owl no one is here. Milk one is miles and miles and miles away you have to let me carry you and my boat like me you are big and plumped can find someone for you to devour help me help me Herman help me Herman his sister said Herman she knocked and kneeled on his door she opened the slowly and slowly then she saw him on the floor she thot he fell a sleep but he was not a sleep he was knoked out Whey a harmon he cadine help yet he was he was knocked out and said to him wake up he say he cannt wake up what can I do he a rotyt to eat him Will eat area mates mother on the the egg is my to eat gone we cant save him as the harmon has done to her it has can we save him mother, mother What happy What happy brothers must all

One day an owl said, "Help me! The eagle has come to eat me!"

The eagle said to the owl, "No one is near. Everyone is miles and miles away."

"Do you have to eat me? Can't you find anybody else?" "No, you are a big plump owl. I can find someone for you to eat, like a worm. Help me! Help me! Herman!"

ANALYTICAL EVALUATION: HELP OR HINDRANCE?

The evaluator of the paper on the following page undoubtedly expended a great deal of time and earnest effort in analyzing the composition and making comments. It is debatable, however, that this labor would genuinely help the student to improve writing skills. For example, the comment, "Some of your details make it seem more like a nightmare!!!" hints of sarcasm, and does not explain what changes should be made to make the imagery more consistent. The numerous comments about conventions could be more efficiently handled by use of the correction symbols.

Weaknesses of the paper are not really addressed: lack of organization, inconsistency of viewpoint, and vagueness of details.

Strengths of the paper, upon which the composition may be more effectively developed, are not adequately noted. "This could be an exciting paragraph..." suggestes that the paragraph has possibilities, but other strengths are not mentioned; e.g.: the comparison of scenes before bargain hunters converge and after they have rummaged for bargains; sensory details in the third paragraph; the humor in the concluding statement.

Following are comments designed to build upon the strengths of the paper and to offer specific prescriptions for remedying the weaknesses. Numbers preceding the comments correspond to numbers placed by the evaluator on the composition (reproduced on page 29).

Your third paragraph really helps readers to see the store. Revise your description to contrast the scene of order and beauty before shoppers come in on EOM day and the chaos after they attack. Show us the chaos as clearly as you show us the order.

1. *We know this is your opinion. Cut this phrase.*
2. *Rework this paragraph to introduce readers to a contrast between order and chaos.*
3. *Make this part of your first paragraph.*
4. *You have sharp details here. Keep this paragraph. Edit to correct errors.*
5. *Good topic for another essay. Save it.*
6. *Great conclusion!*

ASSIGNMENT: Describe a favorite place of yours. Use sensory details to help your readers picture this place in their minds.

My Favorite Place

In my opinion a great place is the Big Discount store. Me and my friends go there alot. I could even live there because its like a dream. You see shoppers shove and push to grab bargains, girls straiten counters one minute and the next minute it looks messier than before. And by the looks on there eyes you could see they want to yell or faint.

The best day to go to the Big D is when they have a sale, like the EOM sale. EOM stands for end-of-the-month. You see shoppers shoving and pushing. Actually fighting sometimes. Its an exciting place.

There's another reason why I think Big Discount is one of my favorite places, that it is the beauty of many things there. Things are arranged neat and clean, rows of red, yellow, and white towels down one lane, shelves of shiny silver and sparkly glass gifts down another lane, and rows and rows of unwrinkled clothes and a long display of fishing rods set up like a tent roof over one aisle. You could stand there and look at the place all day long before it gets messed up by the bargain shoppers.

One more thing is the pet department. They have lots of different kinds of pets. You just want to stand there and look at them.

Now this is not an advertisement for the Big D because my father works there, its just because I like the place.

Some details make it seem more like a NIGHTMARE!

What is the contraction for it is?

a lot

Rule?

Not I!

Who?

How do you spell the 3rd person plural possessive pronoun?

Who?

Rule?

Is this a sentence?

This could be a good paragraph.

I could?

Thing or PLACE?

Rule?

I don't!

These are two sentences! Punctuate them as such!

ASSIGNMENT: Describe a favorite place of yours. Use sensory details to help your readers picture this place in their minds.

My Favorite Place

(1) In my opinion a great place is the Big Discount store. Me and my friends go there alot. I could even live there because its like a dream. You see shoppers shove and push to grab bargains, girls straiten counters one minute and the next minute it looks messier than before. And by the looks on there eyes you could see they want to yell or faint.

(2) The best day to go to the Big D is when they have a sale, like the EOM sale. EOM stands for end-of-the-month. You see shoppers shoving and pushing. Actually fighting sometimes. Its an exciting place.

(3) There's another reason why I think Big Discount is one of my favorite places, that it is the beauty of many things there. Things are arranged neat and clean. rows of red, yellow, and white towels down one lane, shelves of shiny silver and sparkly glass gifts down another lane, and rows and rows of unwrinkled clothes. and a long display of fishing rods set up like a tent roof over one aisle. You could stand there and look at the place all day long before it gets messed up by the bargain shoppers.

(4) One more thing is the pet department. They have lots of different kinds of pets. You just want to stand there and look at them.

(5) Now this is not an advertisement for the Big D because my father works there, its just because I like the place.

(6)

Use I instead of you. Keep first person view.

REVISION: A FOLLOW-UP

Point 5 in "Evaluation: A Step in Writing Process" states that evaluation should lead to *action*. The following is an example of one kind of action: revision based upon suggestions made through constructive comments.

Randi-

Knowing Wellfleet, I enjoyed reading your paper; it stirred up many pleasant memories.

Since you know and love the town so well, here are a few suggestions that might help make your comparison even more vigorous. For openers, how about a title? Remember all essays have titles.

1. *Here, express your idea more naturally – Wellfleet doesn't "display hustle and bustle". Filled may be an ordinary word but it does the job here. People leave the beach; it is not "evacuated". Remember Strunk and White's admonition about preferring the natural to the elegant or strained expression.*
2. *Isn't all this repetition of sentence one? Why not give specific details of these differences?*
3. *Could you clarify this?*
4. *Here you have another excellent source of contrast. Use specific details to liven it up.*
5. *An interesting detail, but how does it relate to your purpose?*
6. *Connect the cottage to Wellfleet in paragraph one, or else this will sound like a new topic.*
7. *The land changes this way? Are you saying precisely what you mean?*
8. *This (like No.6 above) suggests an emphasis not developed in your paper. Stick to the thesis.*

Please revise. Who knows? Maybe we can sell your essay to the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce!

****

During the summer season, Wellfleet displays the hustle and bustle of vacation life, but when winter comes everything seems to slow down. Wellfleet is considered a vacation town where many people spend time during the summer. When winter comes, however, the only people that can be found are the residents or natives of the town. The population drops rapidly from about twenty thousand in the summer to less than one thousand in the winter.

The sand dunes don't noticeably change from season to season, but do change from year to year. It is beautiful at the beach when the sun is shining and there is a slight breeze. Many people may be found refreshing themselves in the cooling watter of the Atlantic Ocean. But as soon as the temperature drops, the beach becomes evacuated and the waves which people row in on are now rough and choppy.

Summer, being the in-season, every restaurant, boutique and supermarket is open. While in the off-season, a few restaurants and supermarkets are open, but no boutique or gift shops.

Both pleasure and fishing boats fill the marina in the summer, making it difficult to find a spot to dock. Buring the winter, the only boats to be found are commercial fishing boats which bring in the lobster and fish supply.

The ponds freeze over in the winter covering up the place where many families used to swim. Ice skaters can now be found gliding around the ponds. All year long the air in Wellfleet is clean because there is no industry in town.

Our house never changes from summer to winter. It is always peaceful and relaxing because it is away from sity life. The land around the house changes from green leaves in the summer to barren trees in the winter.

Wellfleet is a much more active town in the summer than in the winter. The population drop every winter shows this. Even though most things are closed in winter, Wellfleet still is a cozy little town.

****

Wellfleet

Wellfleet, the small Cape Cod town where my family has a summer cottage, is vastly different in winter from the exciting community I know so well. In summer every street and beach is alive with the hustle and bustle of tourists. In restaurants, boutiques and the supermarkets, business thrives. When winter comes, however, only the local townspeople trudge through snowswept streets. Boutiques and gift shops are boarded up, and only the supermarket remains open. The population drops rapidly from twenty thousand to fewer than a thousand.

At the beach the sand dunes themselves don't change from season to season, but the view over them certainly does. In the light summer breeze the sun shines on multi-colored sun umbrellas dotting the beach. The laughter and shrill cries of children dashing back and forth from the water to their sand castles filter into the sounds of Red Sox games and the lively rock music from portable radios beside the striped beach chairs. Hundreds splash around in the cooling waters of the Atlantic. But in the frigid days of winter the lonely shriek of the wind swirls over the empty dunes. Only an occasional gull or the bent form on an individual walking into the wind or throwing a shell into the waves breaks the monotony -- those same waves where last summer young people on surf boards rode the crests.

Both pleasure and fishing boats fill the marina in the summer, making it difficult to find a spot at the dock. During the winter, the only boats to be found are commercial fishing boats which bring in the lobster and fish supply.

To be sure, Wellfleet in winter differs greatly from Wellfleet in summer, but regardless of the season, our cottage in this lovely seaside town is a warm, cozy place filled with memories of both seasons.

****

Randi-

Your revised description paints vivid comparisons. Details in the second paragraph really appeal to the readers' eyes and ears. Your concluding paragraph is an appropiate reflection on the scenes you've painted. Why not send it to the Wellfleet officials?

STOCK BOY

I worked for an auto parts store for a year and eight months. I did the same thing every day. I would get there at eight o'clock every morning and punch my card. First I would check in the shipment and then put it away. Then I would collect all the cores (old starters, water pumps, fuel pumps, clutches, and distributors). I would tag them and then throw in the core barrels. When I got done with the cores I usually went up and down the aisles picking up merchandise that had fallen from the shelves. I was the one that always had to do this. The counter workers wouldn't even think of it. They would drop something on the floor and leave it there. They would say to themselves, "That's OK, Joe will pick it up." I hated it when they did this. At the end of the day I would sweep and mop the floors. I don't know why I had to do this. The tile on the floor was old so it looked better when it wasn't mopped. At this time it was five o'clock. I would punch my card and leave the store immediately. I finally quit that job and as I look on it the prices were totally outragous. At one time when I was their a gallon of anti-freeze costs $7.00. The store would only pay $3.00. A gallon of wind shield washer solvent costs the customers 1.99 a gallon, the store would pay only .89. Starters and alternators are very expensive. The store would sell them to customers for almost twice their costs. Now as I look back at my job I felt like a customer. They would raise the prices and think very little of me because I had to pay the prices for working their.

STOCK BOY

Joe, your detailing of the job routine and of how you were treated shows the boredom of the job and suggests the need for people to work at a job they can like.

1 *Good explanation.*

2 *End your paper here.*

3 *This is another topic. You may want to write another paragraph on price-gouging Be sure, though, to get correct information.*

Use (there) (here) (where) *to refer to* place

Use their *as a* possessive: *their friends*
their prices

isles = islands

aisles = rows

REVISION: A FOLLOW-UP TO EVALUATION

ASSIGNMENT: We often pass by or through a place without opening our eyes and ears to the sights and sounds that place offers us. Take a walk in a place near your home or school. Observe some of the sights and sounds. Then describe what you saw and heard along your walk.

RESULTS: Some students wrote effective sensory descriptions. Others wrote lists of details disjoined from each other and stimulating no single effect.

SAMPLE OF A DRAFT AND A REVISION: The samples on the following page show a description that is really a list of details, and a revision of the first description. The comments of the evaluator helped the student to establish a focus and to create a clearer word-picture.

COMMENTS ON ORIGINAL COMPOSITION:

1 *Give some specific examples. Show, don't just tell us that you disturbed wildlife.*

2 *Why? Did something make you look at them?*

3 *Good description. I can hear it. Did it last long?*

4 *How is this related to the woodland scene? If it isn't related, cut it.*

5 *Your ending is not convincing. The walk does not seem strenuous enough to make you exhausted.*

Larry, You have a situation that can be developed into a vivid picture of how people and their machines intrude upon nature. Try to develop it by showing *how you and the train disturbed the woods.*

COMMENT ON REVISION:

Larry, your revision works. I can see it and hear it.

A WALK IN THE WOODS

Friday I took a walk in the woods at the bottom of my street rep where I live. I stepped on some branches and they cracked. [The noise aroused (1) wildlife around me.] I WW slumped over to pick up a leave SP and I scuffed my foot on a rock. I went on and I came to a spring with clean water rep spring water. I stopped for a while to get a drink. [I looked at the railroad tracks (2)] that went by the woods RO a train raced by. The noise was terrible. It echoed through the woods. The noise rang in my ears and the steel wheels were clanging on the rails. The sky was now getting dark, so I walked home. [On my way I saw a battered up car. (4)] I finally made it home. I slumped into our padded reclining chair and rested. I was a casualty of exaustion. SP (3) (5)

INTRUSION IN THE WOODS

Friday I took a walk in the woods at the bottom of my street. At the entrance I stepped from sun-baked pavement to a soft and cool earth. I stepped on some branches that crackled under me. A startled squirril darted up a pine tree and some birds - chickadees or sparrows - fluttered above me. I bent down to pick up a rust colored leave and scuffed my foot on a rock. The rock rolled down the slight hill, and where it had been I noticed some little bugs, with hair-like legs, scurrying about, maybe looking for shelter. I came to a cool spring and stopped for a while to get a drink of clear water. I felt the earth rumble under my hands and knees. I looked at the railroad tracks that cut through the woods. The train roared closer. Soon the noise of the engine was echoing throughout the woods and ringing in my ears. The steel wheels were clanging on the steel tracks. I pressed my hands onto my ears to muffle the noise. The roar and clang faded away, and I turned homeward. The sky was getting dark. Behind me my forest was at peace.

ALLOWING WRITERS TIME

Ordering experience requires reflection. Expressing experience requires time and space to find the right words, to make mistakes, to discover and record precisely what the writer has experienced.

The following pages are one demonstration of how one junior high school student crafted her essay – her effort – to share one of her poignant experiences.

The student was allowed time to reflect upon the experience and to draft thoughts. The student was allowed room to try words and phrases, to scratch out and to try again. The result attests to the worth of allowing the writer time and space.

but instead I kept turning away, I faced it. I tried to make the best of her life (wonderful) comfortable for her. every day I would sit with her, sing with her and on sunny days we'd both sit out the front porch and watch the cars, "Flight" and the great oak trees and peacefully and look out at the world. But my little sister would never climb that tree or run with other children. Her life had only begun and now it has ended.

This story is very hard for me to write. I knew I should write my story but I wanted to share my poignant experience with other

But I realized that I had some to live life not pitying myself but help others in any way IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

leukemia

All my life I will remember this person very, small beautiful child for she as my will to live, my reason for ry, I only knew her for a short time hen I was young I was stricken by leukemia but I was lucky enough to live 10 years, although there were days of suffering and pain trying to cope with changed my life. My mother had just given birth to another child, a little girl. At the age of 5 months she also was stricken with leukemia To me it was the worst thing that could have ver happened. This child had help e (look) life from a different ngle. Instead of waking up to ief and sorrow. I looked forward to the days ahead of me.

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE.

Then something very ful happened my mother gave birth a little baby girl. c requisite

Today please revise and recopy your work. You might want to check such things as: the overall organization, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling.

This story is very hard for me to write But I wanted to share my poignant story with others.

When I was young I was stricken with bleukemia, but I was lucky enough to live over fourteen years. Nothing I experienced many days of fear and suffering.

Then something very beautiful happened, my mother had given birth to a little baby girl at the age of eight month she was also stricken with Cukemia. To me it was the most odderis thing which could have happened This child helped me look at life from a different angle instead of waking up to grief and sorrow I found myself looking forward to the days

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

shared with my little Mattie
When she died I didn't
turn away I face it for I
had grown a lot in that past
years I tried my hardest to
make the last of her very
short life comfortable for
her Every day I would set
under Her, along with her Aint
On sunny days we would sit
together on the Lawn watch
watching other Children play and
watching the great oak Trees around
Sometimes looking out at the world
I realized that the Child in
my arms would never play
with the other children or climb
that big oak Tree Her life had
only begun and now it had ended.
All my life I will remember
this young Small, beautiful
Child for she was my whole
Life, my reason for joy
I Praise her for ever &

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